New York
Theatre Critics' Reviews
1946

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NEW YORK POST · NEW YORK DAILY NEWS · NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE · NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN

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"A Family Affair"

New York Herald Tribune

NOVEMBER 28, 1946

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Mildly Amusing

QUIPS and quandaries carry "A Family Affair" through a span of very mild amusement at the Playhouse. Of them, the wisecracks are of far more comic consequence to this Henry R. Misrock jape. They are tossed into a feeble plot with a sort of desperate prodigality. When a gag is given a nicely turned delivery by a knowing member of the company, it is vaguely funny, like a joke at a solemn ceremony. Unfortunately, the farcical manipulations of the charade are so obvious and repetitive that they become solemn to the point of tedium.

The author has collected quite a variety of subjects for lampoon. In the course of telling how the members of a supposedly intelligent family identify themselves with the characters in a script written by one of their number, he has witticisms to make about various aspects of sex, Truman and the democratic party, public tastes in current reading, columnists, Tommy Manville, and even ship launching. The very juxtaposition of the jokes, or perhaps merely audience inertia, inspire random laughter.

* * *

Since the witticisms are introduced at random, they do little to define characters or situations which have little enough clarity in the first place. It has been Misrock's not too quaint idea to break up a happy home by having a middle-aged married couple test the cut-ups in which their aspiring playwright son imagines they might indulge. The youngsters follow course and get into somewhat similar fixes. The trouble is that the situations are telegraphed in big block letters and are only resolved by a windy climax in which relationships return to status quo.

* * *

"A Family Affair" is not an easy comedy to perform. Even John Williams and Ann Mason, who have the leading roles, are somewhat puzzled as to just what a line is leading up to. Since it generally leads to no more than the voicing of the line, they stand by for the final curtain. Jewel Curtis is not bad as a practical tramp and Allan Stevenson makes something of a character out of a successful suitor. The others are rather badly hamstrung by the proceedings. They add up to little more in the way of a play than a compendium of snappy sayings.

The New York Times

NOVEMBER 28, 1946.

Love and the Drama

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Since the sole purpose of Henry R. Misrock's "A Family Affair" is to provide entertainment, one must not be petulant or unseemly. Failing to be entertaining is not a crime; it only seems like a crime while it lasts. As acted at The Playhouse last evening in a run-through performance with costumes, "A Family Affair" looks like nothing so much as second-rate popular writing from the lush Twenties.

Mr. Misrock, author of "Bright Honor" of ten years ago has an amusing notion for a comedy. The precocious son of a pleasant mother and father has written a comedy about his family. Although his relatives regard his comedy as absurd and fantastic, they proceed to behave like his characters, much to his surprise and horror. He has to work very hard to reverse the juggernaut and get his family back where it was originally.

As things go in the theatre, which is not very well ordinarily, this is a bright idea for a comedy. Furthermore, Mr. Misrock writes an occasional bright line. To say that "the readers of Life exist from one Friday to the next only to find out what they think" is to disclose an enterprising mind. After reading his son's comedy about the family, the father testily declares that Johnny must have studied playwriting under Frank Harris. Good. Mr. Misrock has also had the initiative to send one psychiatrist to another psychiatrist for treatment. This shows a wholesome point of view.

But to review "A Family Affair" in those terms is to look desperately on the bright side of things. For Mr. Misrock's antic rattles around on the stage like a truck-load of bricks on a country road. Let's not discuss the performance.

'A FAMILY AFFAIR.'

Play by Henry R. Misrock; staged by Alexander Kirkland; setting by Sam Leve; presented by Jesse Long and Edward S. Hart at the Playhouse Wednesday evening, November 27, 1946.

THE CAST

Florence	Emily Ross
Mary	Adele Rowlan
Alice	Jewel Curtis
Julia	Ann Mason
Walter	John Williams
Johnny	Joel Marston
Martha	Lenore Thomas
Ella	Alice Stevenson
George	Robert Smith
Fuzz	Margaret Garland
Dr. Patterson	Frank Lyon
Gregorio	Anatole Winogradoff

SYNOPSIS: The action of the play takes place in the Wallace living room, New York City. Late summer, 1946. Act I—About 5 o'clock in the afternoon. Act II—Several hours later. Act III—Early next morning.

Journal American

NOVEMBER 29, 1946

'A Family Affair' At the Playhouse

By ROBERT GARLAND

There's nothing outrageously wrong about the little new play at the Playhouse. There's nothing outrageously right about it, either. An uncertain Mr. Misrock made it up out of his own head after having lain dramatically dormant ever since his "Bright Honor" managed to achieve a 17-performance run in the Autumn of 1936. And just a little west in 48th st., where "Harvey" does quite nicely.

In a kind Christian spirit well suited to the season a kind initial audience met Mr. Misrock more than half way. At the night-before-Thanksgiving festivity nobody could have loved "A Family Affair"—such is the piece's designation—as much as these would-be helpful members of the premier Broadway congregation. Not even Jesse Long and Edward Hart as co-producers. Or some backer with misgivings.

On second thought, it couldn't possibly have been "A Family Affair" itself that the folks out front were so actively acclaiming, the little new play written by Henry R. Misrock and staged by Alexander Kirkland against the Walter Wallaces' mid-Manhattan living-room as designed by Samuel Leve. It must have been the paintings hanging on the walls. The real hand-painted pictures like in a picture gallery.

* * *

Play Plus Pictures

Not in all my theatregoing nights has a make-believe living-room been adorned by such high-toned pictures as the pictures to be seen, with a little new play thrown in, at the Playhouse. Looking closely, you can see all six of them, beginning up over the mantlepiece with "Blue Mountain" by Robert Philipp and ending out in the entrance hall with "Yellow Vase With Flowers" by Lada Hlvaka.

Where the directors of The Museum of Modern Art give you movies with your paintings, the producers of "A Family Affair" give you paintings with your play. At the Playhouse, the paintings are the better. Mr. Philipp hangs around in his "blue" period, while Mr. Hlvaka hangs around in his "my new country" period. He has said farewell to Czechoslovakia and his vases across the sea.

Elsewhere at the Playhouse, hanging on the Walter Wallaces' mid-Manhattan walls, are "Helen, Marty and the Yellow Hair Ribbon" by Margery Ryerson, "Truro Bouquet" by Gene Alder Walker and "Vermont Landscape" by Marian Sloane. And, whenever Mr. Misrock's little new play loses your attention, you can relax and enjoy the hand paintings.

* * *

Pictures vs. Play

Taking my wandering first-night attention from the hand paintings on the wall and placing it on the dialogue on the stage, "A Family Affair" looks familiarly like the play about a playwright every playwright has to get out of his system. It's never a good play, or even interesting, and Mr. Misrock's is no exception to the rule. But it was fun to write, no doubt. And to read out loud for company.

This little new play hard by the little old "Harvey" has a rising young dramatist as protagonist. Johnny Wallace by name, curly-haired by nature, he puts his papa and his mama, his sister and his girl-friend, his boy-friends and his backers, into his in-rehearsal manuscript. And any connection with real or footlighted credibility is, of course, coincidental. But the lawyers say "No!"

There're some good, a few better and one best gag in the little new play by Mr. Misrock. But they're all dragged in lend lustre to an all-too-lacklustre comedy. And a cast in which Ann Mason and John Williams are features, Joel Marston is tops, and Anatole Winogradoff is bottoms, did what it could last Wednesday to lighten, brighten and tighten a pre-Thanksgiving festival... Notice, please: I've made no cheap and obvious crack about a turkey, tiny as it was. I could have!

PM

NOVEMBER 29, 1946

—Kronenberger—

A Dull Account Of Two People Being Lively

PM Reviews

There are a number of comedies that call less for separate reviews than for a pair of ditto marks. It's not that they are exactly alike—they may vary considerably in plot—but that their net effect is exactly alike. Sitting them out, your reaction is a little less "I have seen this before" than "I have felt like this before." And you weren't feeling cheerful.

A Family Affair is the latest such comedy—not the worst that Broadway has to offer, but still pretty bad; not quite hopeless, but emphatically endless. Its author, Mr. Misrock, rises to an occasional bright line or agreeable moment; but he hands out his better wares with a coffee-spoon and his worse ones with a shovel. The plot thickens but the play refuses to jell; the characters are all live wires, but the juice has been turned off; the dialogue keeps ticking away but almost never remembers to chime. There is even, mixed in with a general air of something basically harmless, that sharp sense of something ineradicably shoddy.

A Family Affair deals with an orderly, contented couple who find that their son has portrayed them as dull dogs in a play. Their lustier instincts challenged, the wife bounds off with a psychoanalyst and the husband starts hitting it up with his secretary. The young playwright, having started more than he bargained for, reaches frantically for the brake; and of course the parents, whose revels have not been very reckless, are reunited—on a more youthful footing. There is also a daughter in the play who has trouble choosing between two men, but who finally chooses right.

The whole thing (as is also standard in such comedies) is played with its foot on the pedal, which only makes things louder without being funnier. Ann Mason and John Williams prove a very acceptable couple for such proceedings, but they are about the only thing that one can accept.

—Louis Kronenberger

The Sun

NOVEMBER 29, 1946

'A Family Affair,' Presented at Playhouse, Frail and Hopeless Little Comedy.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

The comedy called "A Family Affair," which turned up Wednesday evening at the Playhouse, began floundering just after the first curtain rose and it got nowhere as the evening went on. It's one of those frail and hopeless little plays that belong in the summer stock theater, if anywhere.

Henry R. Misrock wrote "A Family Affair." His new comedy is all about the ruction brought about when young Johnny Wallace writes and sells a play in which his own parents and others he knows well are characters. There is occasionally an amusing line in Misrock's dialogue, but his situations are laboriously contrived and his characters are generally silly.

Actually, "A Family Affair," played in one set and three acts, is only slightly better than such earlier misfits as "The Bees and the Flowers" and "Hidden Horizon". But it must have seemed funny to Alexander Kirkland, an experienced hand in the theater, when he took on the job of director.

There are some players in "A Family Affair"—such people as John Williams, Ann Mason, Jewel Curtis, Lenore Thomas—who would be entirely agreeable with better material, but in the proceedings at the Playhouse they are only ridiculous. Miss Curtis, however, shows definite promise.

Jesse Long and Edward S. Hart produced "A Family Affair." They're probably wondering why.

New York World-Telegram

NOVEMBER 29, 1946

'Family Affair' a Frothy Tale

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

"A Family Affair" is a trivial hullabaloo that leaves everybody in it pretty much where he started. It is like giving a cocktail a good shaking, only to find the ingredients fall to the bottom of the shaker in neat separation.

This one concerns a young playwright who has sold an opus based on his observations about his family, and what he imagined they were really up to.

His fictional father is to take a nightclub singer to Caracas, while his mother goes away with an old family friend who is her lover. His sister is depicted as a hesitant damsel who keeps two gentlemen in conference to decide which she will marry. This is an unpleasant habit which is actual with her.

Amusing to Mother.

The father of the playwright is incensed over this invasion of privacy, and none of the other characters is very pleased. Only his mother finds the situation amusing.

The budding genius has a high disregard for marriage. He has expressed this post-last-war philosophy in his play, and is promoting an affair with the ingenue who loves him.

The general plan is that after a great deal of talk, the characters decide to try out the destinies the playwright has allotted them.

Father worms out of Mother the fact that she had an affair 25 years ago in college with their now mutual friend, a psychiatrist. He so irritates Mother that she decides to leave with the doctor. Father follows suit with his secretary.

Writes Play on Tryst.

Sister marries one of her boy friends and spends the night worrying about all the others. The playwright's ingenue makes a tryst with him, and he spends the night rewriting his play, while she waits.

Father and his girl spent a bibulous night at Coney Island. Mother was bored to death by the psychiatrist and spent her time circling the reservoir. Sister straightens out her love life and the playwright votes for marriage after all.

The cast is to be commended for playing this ado about nothing with vitality and intentness. None of them has more than one dimension in which to work.

Ann Mason is smooth, handsome and good humored as Mother, and John Williams is irate and amusing as Father. Joel Marston brings sincerity and confusion to the daft young playwright.

Like Soap Operas.

Jewel Curtis makes the frank little secretary from Tennessee as amusing as possible, and Margaret Garland contends with the part of Sister, who behaves like the soap operas she writes.

In smaller parts Lenora Thomas is pleasantly effective as the spurned ingenue, and Allan Stevenson brings a likable personality to the reporter who wins Sister.

Emily Ross comes as close to getting real laughs as anyone else in the part of an old friend of Mother's, and Anatole Winogradoff runs her a close second as a Russian producer. Frank Lyon has little to do but stooge as the psychiatrist.

Alexander Kirkland keeps the performance brisk by his direction, but it is the sort of thing which might only be amusing if staged in the spirit of Abbott and Costello. A tossed custard pie would seem high wit in these surroundings.

DAILY NEWS

NOVEMBER 28, 1946

Marriage Must Be Funnier Than 'A Family Affair' Shows It to Be

By JOHN CHAPMAN

If I were gifted with the powers of divination I should, after profoundly considering the omens and phenomena which were displayed last evening at the Playhouse, predict for "A Family Affair" a long and prosperous future—in the catalogue of some play publisher specializing in amateur rights.

"A Family Affair" would take its place in the catalogue among fifty little comedies just like it—harmless, amiable pieces nicely suited for production by a 4-H club for a royalty fee of no more than $10.

Which is to say that Henry R. Misrock's comedy is well-intentioned, inoffensive and routine. It is about a couple who have been married for a long time and who therefore must, according to one of the rules of the Dramatists' Guild, go out and Have Their Fling. Husband goes to Coney Island with his secretary. Wife goes talking with a schooldays suitor who has become a psychiatrist. Next morning wife and husband are more deeply in love than ever.

There are some other romances, too, involving a son who is loved by an ingenue and a daughter who is besought—and what a predicament!—by a newspaper man and by a radio announcer. Any 4-H club could get up a dandy cast. The Playhouse cast is a pleasant and attractive group which includes Ann Mason, John Williams, Jewel Curtis, Joel Marston, Lenore Thomas and Frank Lyon.

I am afraid that "A Family Affair" is on the thin side for Broadway consumption. If you want a comedy about long-married people, go see Ina Claire and Howard St. John in George Kelly's "The Fatal Weakness." It, is much funnier and smarter and it gives the actors a better workout.

New York Post

NOVEMBER 29, 1946

There Isn't Much to Be Said For New Domestic Comedy

By Richard Watts Jr.

Playgoers who found the Jean-Paul Sartre play, "No Exit," too bizarre for their tastes earlier in the week must certainly have found nothing to disturb them in "A Family Affair" Wednesday night, and it serves them right. Here, in the new comedy by Henry R. Misrock, everything goes safely according to convention, nothing unhallowed by time is tried, and there is no idea, laughter or emotion involved that has not been handsomely tested by tradition The resulting play is, so far as I am concerned, a prize-winning entry in the season's apathy sweepstakes.

At least it must be said on be. half of "A Family Affair" that it is the most heavily cultured comedy of the year. Greatly concerned with literature, it casually tosses into the dialogue the names of such eminent writing men as Hemingway, O'Neill, Chekhov, Gorky, Ibsen, Sherwood Anderson, George Jean Nathan, Jimmy Fidler, Westbrook Pegler and Errol Flynn, to set down just a few I noted in passing. Then, to show that it is aware of music as well as letters, it mentions Sibelius every few minutes. It is all very impressive.

Playwright's Havoc

It is but right that the comedy should pay its proper respects to literature, since its melancholy subject matter is the havoc wrought by a playwright. According to its argument, the home life of Julia and Walter Wallace had been happy for over twenty years, despite the presence of twins, one of whom wrote plays and the other radio serials. Then the playwright son sells a comedy in which his father and mother are shown as sexually unhappy, and the parents begin to believe what he has said about them.

One of the play's contentions is that not only the parents, but their friends and their daughter's sweethearts, recognize themselves in the son's script immediately, and, since I found "A Family Affair" a restful comedy, I began brooding over the matter. The author may be correct about the inevitability with which people recognize characters patterned after them in books and plays, but I thought of two cases that disputed it.

Once in Madrid during the Spanish Anti-Fascist War I met a newspaperman who seemed to me obviously the original of a reporter in Hemingway's "The Fifth Column," and on another occasion I encountered in Moscow a correspondent who had appeared thinly disguised in a then famous book called "Winter in Moscow." To my surprise, both of them seemed pretty bitter that they had been left out of their friends' works. Perhaps it is only newspapermen who are too modest to recognize themselves as fictional characters. Anyway, I bring up the matter merely to show how even the best-intentioned mind can roam during such a mild sort of comedy.

By dint of some furious activity, there are a few amusing moments in "A Family Affair," but it is so elaborately plotted and laboriously manufactured that most of it is insufferably dull. Its people, its situations and its dialogue are without life, freshness or spontaneity, and they lack both interest and credibility. A number of juveniles and ingenues and such skillful veterans as John Williams and Ann Mason work with fine determination to make something out of virtually nothing, but it is no use.

An EXCELLENT GIFT SOLUTION

New York

Theatre Critics' Reviews

"No Exit"

The Sun

NOVEMBER 27, 1946

'No Exit,' Adaptation of Jean-Paul Sartre's Short Psychological Drama, Has Premiere.

For more than two years now Paris playgoers have been flocking to see "Huis-Clos," a short psychological melodrama by Jean-Paul Sartre, guiding figure in the current Existentialist cult there. Last evening Herman Levin and Oliver Smith gave New Yorkers a chance to sample it as they set an English adaptation by Paul Bowles on the stage of the Biltmore Theater under the title, "No Exit."

In its American version it proved both unusual and unpleasant at times to the point of repellency. Moreover, before it had reached its bitter ending, it grew repetitious to the brink of tedium, despite the brilliance of some of the writing. The acting shone all the way, however. It was originally planned to unfold "No Exit" in one long act without intermission. At the last minute it was decided to break it into two scenes.

The site which Sartre has chosen for his play is a tiny niche in hell. Into a cramped and hideous and constantly lighted room, he brings as sordid a trio as any one slumming in Hades could ask for. The lone man in the three had mistreated his wife, had been a collaborator with the Nazis and had been executed as a traitor; one of the women, a victim of abnormality, had broken up a happy marriage; the other, the sensuous, shallow wife of a wealthy man, far older than herself, had murdered a child of hers born out of wedlock.

It is the playwright's ingenious thesis that this group, all strangers to each other before their arrival, must spend eternity together, and how they begin selfishly to prey on individual weaknesses, making their relationship one of utter torture, furnishes what action there is on the stage. From the very narrowness of the structure, Sartre has built for himself, however much of the plot has to be told, not portrayed.

The producers have brought the noted French actor, Claude Dauphin, to America to enact the part of Cradeau, who worked with the Germans, and he gives a superb performance in the role. His cringing, nervous entrance into the room from which there is no escape starts the play off at a high level, and he is particularly fine later when Cradeau, trapped by his own lack of character, struggles to escape the stigma of cowardice with which he knows he has been branded.

Ruth Ford is excellent too as the infanticide, bringing out all the selfishness and cruelty in the woman's character. She is at her best as she peers back to earth to watch a boy who has been enamored of her dancing with another girl. To Annabella falls the thankless role of the unnatural woman, and she acts it forcefully. Peter Kass completes the cast in a brief appearance as a bellboy for Satan.

John Huston has directed skillfully and Frederick Kiesler has furnished a properly depressing setting. The curtain did not rise until 9 o'clock last night and the audience was sent forth into the Lewis-darkened streets at 10:45. This reviewer, at least, had had more than his fill by then.

HERRICK BROWN.

'NO EXIT.'

Play by Jean-Paul Sartre; adapted from the French by Paul Bowles; directed by John Huston; setting and lighting designed by Frederick Kiesler; presented by Herman Levin and Oliver Smith at the Biltmore Theater Tuesday evening, November 26, 1946. The cast:

Cradeau	Claude Dauphin
Bellboy	Peter Kass
Inez	Annabella
Estelle	Ruth Ford

SYNOPSIS: A room. Time, the present. "No Exit" is presented in one act with an intermission between its two scenes.

New York World-Telegram

NOVEMBER 27, 1946

'No Exit' a Story of the Damned

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

If the inhabitants of Hell have any similarity to the characters of "No Exit" it is a coincidence of which marked note should be made by sinners.

This unpleasant trio deserves all it gets and more. Therein lies the play's chief weakness. If this interesting philosophical conception of evil destiny applies only to such misfits, it is not much challenge to the average fellow.

The Hades of "No Exit" is indeed a torturing spot. No physical pain is meted out in this endless hotel. But one-room suites are allotted to little groups carefully selected to goad and irritate each other into infinity.

Eternal Frustration.

None of the occupants is capable of any solace for another. Neither can any of them, though rankled beyond measure, find release in violence. It is eternal frustration.

The depressing aspects of this suspended unpleasantness start with the bellboy's telling each new arrival that there are no toothbrushes in Hell. The windows are bricked up, the doors are locked and the bells do not work.

An added thorn to the ladies is the complete absence of mirrors.

On top of all this no one ever sleeps or even blinks his eyes.

No Virtues Revealed.

The trio under observation in "No Exit" consists of a collaborator, a lesbian and a murderess. If these seem tags, it might be added that none of the three reveal any virtues on the side.

Because there is no way out of it in such proximity, they reveal their specific crimes and generally ugly natures to each other.

Cradeau is a journalist who liked to think he was simply consistent when he allowed his pacifistic beliefs to tie him in with the German occupants of Paris. His rationalized crime was running away from the victorious French when they returned.

They put a dozen bullets in him, but it would be a relief to him to have someone think he was not a coward.

Revolted by Men.

Inez is a complex stenographer who is revolted by men. She managed to lure her cousin's wife away from him, and after he killed himself, the two women were gassed by the wife.

Estelle is voracious, shallow and vain. She is lost without mirrors, the only thing that ever kept her awake except men. She murdered her illegitimate child and was unmoved by her lover's suicide. She is surprised at people's coolness when she died of pneumonia.

Inez must forever be denied the affection of Estelle. Estelle can never win Cradeau because she is too insincere to care whether he is a coward or not.

Cradeau finds no relief in Estelle and must go on watching the realistic Inez' contempt for his yellow streak.

Never Really Comes Off.

What ought to be a terrifying fate for the damned never really comes off. The relationships are established too rapidly. The characters are so unsympathetic that their rebellion is of no moment.

The adaptation introduces some weak jokes, and slang that is joltingly out of place. It is disturbing to hear a Parisian stenographer use "Salvation Nell" as a scornful epithet.

Dauphin Tries Hard.

There is no particular feeling of timelessness about the play, nor of warmth, although the characters mention the heat and obligingly loosen their collars.

Annabella as Inez comes off better than the others. The part is stronger in its accepted disillusionment, and she gives it a bitter force.

Cradeau is not an interesting enough character study to give Claude Dauphin a very suspicious local debut. He tries to give the play variety with a sort of smirking Chevalier-Trenet swagger and a snivelling hysteria. But it just is not there.

Ruth Ford has some nice moments as Estelle, but is inclined to interlard her more effective scenes with some peculiarly amateurish interpretation.

John Huston's direction is designed to keep the play moving, but a performance that strips 'ts gears going uphill clouds his purpose.

DAILY NEWS

NOVEMBER 27, 1946

Three People Go to Hell and Find It a Very Dull Place in 'No Exit'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

I seenk zot zis play, "Nooh Egzzit" ees—oop, sorry! I got carried away there for a moment. I think that this play, "No Exit," has a good deal less in it than meets the ear. And what meets the ear isn't so much considering the trouble one must take to distinguish between the heavy, almost Teutonic accent of Annabella, the Parisian brogue of Claude Dauphin and the astonishingly plain American of Ruth Ford.

Presented by Herman Levin and Oliver Smith last evening at the Biltmore Theatre, "No Exit" is a short fantasy about two women and one man who, having died appropriately graceless deaths, find themselves in hell. The author is Jean-Paul Sartre, who, from all accounts, is the Aimee Semple McPherson of current French philosophy.

As the three characters got to talking about what they were going to do now that they were in hell, my attention wandered, but once in a while it would come back and I'd hear a dandy line. For instance, I caught Miss Ford panting to Monsieur Dauphin, "Here are my lips—all yours, all yours." I could not, however, get excited about Annabella's unnatural passes at Miss Ford, but I did notice that advance tips on this twist of the plot had got around among a number of odd young men in the audience who were terribly, terribly interested.

Anyhow, in Jean-Paul Sartre's little dramatic exercise, three people are bowed into hell by a pleasant bellboy. The weather is a bit warm, but there are no thumbscrews or other physical tortures—just a room where they can sit and talk. After they sit and talk for the duration of the play they decide that, in the words of one of them, hell is just other people. I think they got fed up with each other, and I wonder why it took them so long.

Dauphin is a good French character actor and I'd like to see him in another play. Paul Bowles did the translation, filling it with jolly Americanisms, and Frederick Kiesler designed the simple and not particularly hellish room. John Huston is credited with the direction.

Journal-American

NOVEMBER 27, 1946

'No Exit' Has Debut At Biltmore Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

The French, they are a funny race,
Whose plays seem queer and out of place
When brought across the ocean blue
And dished out cold to me—and you!

Excuse it, boss! As your venerable, broad-minded, should-be-dignified member (in good enough standing, too) of The Drama Critics' Circle, I know I shouldn't dawdle here and now, well after midnight, with my unsuccessful jingle about an imported play which, at the moment, is a success (artistically, at least) in Paris, London, and, as far as I know, many another European capital on that jittery, disillusioned, unhappy, warworn continent.

The truth is, I don't know exactly what else to do. Who am I, even as a venerable, broad-minded, should-be-dignified reporter on things theatrical, to say that Jean-Paul Sartre's "Huis-Clos," translated out of French and into English ("No Exit," it is called) by Paul Bowles, produced (courageously, believe me) by Herman Levin and Oliver Smith, and directed (sympathetically, I'm sure) by John Huston, sounds like so much chi-chi?

Perverse chi-chi, I know. But chi-chi, just the same. Along with his one other play, "Les Mouches" ("The Flies" to you and me), Mr. Sartre sets himself up as the propounder of existential philosophy. And existential philosophy, my brighter betters tell me, concerns itself with the individual, his inner nature and his fate. Non-naturalistic modernism, if I know what I mean. (And I don't!).

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Naughty, Naughty!

Anyway, "No Exit" is unpretty high-toned intellectual hoity-toity as presented (as I have said, courageously) by the aforesaid Mr. Levin and Mr. Smith. And it's thankful I am for beholding it last evening at the Biltmore. If I hadn't beheld it (from nine until practically eleven) I couldn't have suggested (in unsuccessful verse) that "Huis Clos" seems queerly out of place up on an open stage in 47th st., hard by a workaday garage.

For "No Exit" goes on and on to tell the weird and wormy story of three postwar Parisians gone literally to hell. Cradeau, insistently a man; Estelle, persistently a woman, and Inez, consistently in-between, find themselves in Satan's custody as the curtain rises on Frederick Kiesler's stunning single setting. And his sole satanic Bellboy (such is his designation) is devilishly in charge.

What follows, in two scenes (with an intermission during which the actors cat-nap in their chairs), is a long-drawn, detailed and extraordinarily uninteresting account of how the unholy three got the way they are. And where they find themselves as well. One by one, they come down front and relate their story to the audience. And when their story sounds like anything at all, it sounds like bragging. Gee, boss, those Jean and Johnny Crapauds sure were naughty!

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Accent on Accent

They're not in the hands of what I (or you) could call good actors, either. The Claude Dauphin and Peter Kass, the Ruth Ford and Suzanne Charpentier (Annabella, in another word) who pretend to be the naughty Jean and Johnny Crapauds, are quite obviously more sinned against than usual. Until the author painstakingly gangs up on them, no one of the four (which takes in the hellish bellhop) would harm a sleeping drama critic.

I wasn't sleeping, boss. Honestly I wasn't! Those teeny-weeny snores you heard didn't emerge from me. When I grew weary of watching post-mortem reminiscences as pictured by the playwright, I turned to wondering about the players to whom they are entrusted. Claude Dauphin, for instance. What's Claude got that half-a-dozen (half-a-hundred, really) members of Actors Equity haven't got in greater abundance? Certainly not see Eengleesh language as he speaks it.

And Suzanne Charpentier, billed as Annabella! If Annabella remains out of France and in America 10 more years, she'll not be able to speak English at all. (Her acting is no fine importation, either). So thick, so varied, so unintelligible are the accents heard in "No Exit," that when Ruth Ford opens her mouth to talk for hell-gone Estelle, you wonder what language the lady thinks she's speaking. Well, it's plain, unbroken English!...

And so—

When served up cold to me, and you,
On our side of the ocean blue,
Queer plays seem sadly out of place—
The French, they ARE a funny race!

The New York Times

NOVEMBER 27, 1946

In 'No Exit' Paul Sartre Has Dramatized the Despair of Lost Souls Tortured by Being in Each Other's Company

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Being a person of agile mind, Jean-Paul Sartre has written a fascinating and macabre play about three lost souls in hell. "No Exit," they call it in Paul Bowles' excellent English adaptation, and it was played with horrible logic and pitiless skill by four actors at the Biltmore last evening. Since it lasts scarcely more than an hour and a half, it is a brief sensation. Short as it is, it still may be ten or fifteen minutes too long for its own good in the theatre.

But in this one hurried essay about the damned, M. Sartre has sharply dramatized the loneliness and despair of souls that are lost, imprisoned and condemned to eternal torture in each other's company. If you wish, you may accept it as a bitter and resentful comment on life by a man of intellect whose hopes have been shattered by the colossal disasters of recent experience.

* * *

On its own terms, "No Exit" is ingenious, ugly and scornful. Two women and one man are locked up together in one hideous room in hell. Their first impressions are distasteful, but not too bad. For they imagine that they can dwell at least in the privacy of their thoughts—retaining at least some private dignity in their personal "pipe dreams" about themselves. But that illusion soon passes. They wring out of each other the black secret of their squalid crimes on earth.

Each one of them fondly imagines that one of the others can save him. Each flings himself hopefully at one of the others. But in the end it turns out that none of them can escape from the acts they have committed, and must be damned by them forever. Probably this is what M. Sartre wishes to say in his flaring play about dead souls: Man is alone in this world; he is responsible to his own will and decisions; no one can save him from himself.

The picture he draws is as gruesome as the characters, who are in varying degrees unspeakable. The man has been a coward—probably a collaborator, certainly a sadistic tormentor of his wife. One of the women has been a cruel betrayer of her husband and her lover. The other is a loathsome homosexual who has poisoned and destroyed the life of a married woman of whom she had become enamored.

With such characters, "No Exit" is a grim experience to undergo in the theatre. What redeems it is the skill of M. Sartre's craftsmanship and the knife-edge dexterity of the writing, which must owe something to Mr. Bowles' idiomatic English translation. And beyond the trapped agony of the three doomed characters lies the intellectual climate in which M. Sartre is living. That has some bearing on this withered play. For M. Sartre is one of the prophets of the current vogue of a Parisian philosophy in which the individual dissociates himself from society (which has betrayed him) and acts for himself alone. Your drama courier does not understand it very clearly, and merely observes that "No Exit" proceeds out of such premises.

Under John Huston's evocative direction, the play is brilliantly acted. Frederick Kiesler, has designed a monumentally ugly room where this game of penance is played. As Cradeau, Claude Dauphin, recently from Paris, is giving a lively, pictorial performance of despair, rage and cowardice. Ruth Ford is playing the sensualist with nervous desperation; and as the homosexual, Annabella is giving a bold and calculated performance that packs one corner of hell with horror.

Not a care-free evening in the theatre, but one that gives you the creeps and also a furtive glance into the post-war state of mind of a Parisian intellectual.

New York Post

NOVEMBER 27, 1946

French Play Concerning Hell Striking Dramatic Oddity

By Richard Watts Jr.

Although "No Exit" is the work of the French playwright who is looked upon as the father of Existentialism, it turns out to be neither an explanation nor a defence of that gloomy new Gallic philosophy. While it is certainly a cheerless little drama in outlook and attitude, the new play at the Biltmore Theatre depends for its interest on no deep and brooding philosophical melancholia which must be weighed grimly for its import. It is merely an odd and ingenious melodramatic fable about some people in Hell, which is shrewdly written, skillfully acted and intelligently directed, and it provides an entertaining theatrical novelty for a conceivably jaded palate.

I am decidedly no authority on the post-war metaphysics of pessimism whose apostles are the Jean-Paul Sartre who wrote "No Exit" and the apparently more colorful playwright and journalist named Camus, but it is my impression that, if anything, the new play is inclined to go contrary to the tenets of Existentialism. Where the philosophy, as I understand it, preaches the futility of human endeavor, the drama tells us that endeavor is anything but futile, since by it we can make or ruin our fate through all eternity.

To this extent, "No Exit" may be considerably closer to the convictions of the French intellectuals than the expressed philosophical system of its author. For it is one of the most dramatically ironical aspects of Existentialism that it was formulated and advanced by men who, instead of surrendering to any belief in the uselessness of endeavor, refused to give in to their Nazi conquerors and fought brilliantly in their shattered land's triumphant resistance movement.

Such reflections are perhaps inevitable in a critical contemplation of "No Exit" but they have more to do with the author himself than with the arresting theatrical fable he has concocted. In it the thought is neither deep nor significant. What is important is that he has devised a taut and absorbing narrative about three people, a collaborationist newspaper man, an amorous woman who has slain her unwanted baby and a sadistically-minded lesbian, who find themselves occupying the same room in a Hell that is tawdry and dismal rather than filled with fire and brimstone.

It is M. Sartre's conception that the irony of Hell lies in the fact that it is no torture chamber in which sulfurous devils torment the damned with racks and thumbscrews but a sort of penal cafeteria where the inmates are their own torturers. His three doomed sinners, for all their knowledge that if they keep to themselves they are comparatively safe from harm, cannot resist the temptation to pry into each other's lives with savage results. Hell, as the collaborationist puts it, is other people.

By its very nature, the Sartre drama is static, talkative and limited in its action, even though it runs for considerably less than two hours. Yet the author has been skillful and inventive enough to give his narrative of three souls in self-torment almost consistent dramatic suspense and interest. "No Exit" is not a work of distinguished stature but it manages to be intelligently absorbing.

The production helps it considerably. John Huston, one of the authentic talents among film directors, proves equally effective in directing for the theatre, Frederick Kiesler's setting is wonderfully hideous and the performances are admirable. Claude Dauphin, a distinguished French actor, makes his American debut by playing the unhappy journalist, wracked by the fear that he died a coward, with impressive power. Ruth Ford is extremely effective as the homicidal mother, skillfully managing to be both dramatic and sardonically humorous, and Anabella, looking very handsome in her mannish clothes, portrays the lesbian incisively.

"No Exit" is an interesting psychological melodrama which might well start a new fad. It is possible to imagine that listing one's partners in an Existentialist Hell might become quite a parlor game.